



# News Release

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## **West Nile virus prevention starts with you**

*Avoid mosquito bites and get rid of mosquito habitat near your home*

**OLYMPIA** — Spring is here and many Washingtonians are gardening, hiking, and heading outdoors for fun. It's also time to start thinking about West Nile virus prevention. The easiest and best way to avoid infection is to prevent mosquito bites.

Last year was Washington's most active year for West Nile virus — 38 human illness cases were identified in the 2009 season, with exposures in either eastern Washington or out of state. The first death in Washington from the virus was also reported in a Yakima County resident.

"The warm, wet spring season in our state marks the start of mosquito-breeding season, so it's vital to get rid of the habitat mosquitoes favor around your home," said Gregg Grunenfelder, assistant secretary for the Department of Health. "A good early season strategy is to reduce mosquito breeding habitat before the bugs get started."

You can avoid mosquito bites in two primary ways — habitat reduction and personal prevention. Keep mosquito populations lower by getting rid of water that collects around the yard in old flower pots, waste tires, or cans, and keep water fresh in bird baths, pet dishes, and stock troughs. Simple personal protection steps will make it harder for mosquitoes to bite you. Wear long-sleeve shirts, pants, and hats in mosquito-infested areas; use an effective repellent on exposed skin when mosquitoes are most active. Make sure screens fit tight; fix or replace broken screens.

West Nile virus was detected in 72 horses, 22 dead birds, one dog, and 346 mosquito samples in the state in 2009. Half of all the horses infected died or were euthanized. There is a vaccine for horses; [contact a veterinarian for more details](http://agr.wa.gov/News/2010/10-07.aspx) (<http://agr.wa.gov/News/2010/10-07.aspx>).

The virus is spread by infected mosquitoes. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito won't have any symptoms. Some may develop mild symptoms, such as fever or headache that go away without treatment. The virus is most dangerous for people with weak immune systems and those over 50. In some cases, people may develop meningitis or encephalitis; some neurological effects can be permanent.

Monitoring for the virus — including dead bird and mosquito testing — resumes this spring. The information helps state and local health agencies identify unusual increases or clusters of bird deaths. People can [report dead birds](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) using the agency's dead bird reporting system, or by contacting their [local health agency](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm).

More information about West Nile virus is available by calling the agency's West Nile virus information line, 1-866-78-VIRUS (1-866-788-4787). Updates are also posted on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/WA_DeptofHealth) (http://twitter.com/WA\_DeptofHealth).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
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